

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

Most sceptics, in their efforts to debunk the ETH, employ a priori and ad hominem arguments to attack reports which seem to indicate that there might be a case to be made for it. They also sometimes give the impression that any explanation will do, so that we are sometimes given two or three of them to choose from.

We intend to take a more reasonable line, maintaining a critical attitude to inadequate sceptical explanations as well as a refusal to accept unlikely tales unsupported by corroborative evidence or independent witnesses.

HE IS A LUMBERJACK AND HE'S OKAY: THE WALTON EXPERIENCE

A baffling case

Q. What do sceptics do when they encounter a baffling UFO report?

A. They jump up and down and shout 'Liars! Liars!'

Many initially puzzling cases are eventually solved, at least to the satisfaction of most serious ufologists, by a process of long and painstaking investigation and careful examination of the available evidence and testimony. A few, however, seem to the unbiased researcher to offer no easy answers and it is these that rouse the sceptics to hysteria in their denunciations of witnesses and ufologists. One of the most interesting of such cases is the incident which occurred in Arizona on 5 November 1975.

On that day Travis Walton claimed to have encountered a UFO while on his way home from his work as a logger in the Sitgreaves National Forest. He was apparently taken on board the UFO and returned, several miles away, five days later.

If Walton had been alone at the time this story would probably have been almost forgotten by now. The problem for the sceptics, though, was that when Walton encountered the flying saucer there were six other men with him. Apparently they all supported his story and testified that they panicked and drove away when Walton was zapped by the saucer. They returned a short time later, but could not find him. He turned up five days later in a telephone booth in the nearby town of Heber.

Possible explanations

This is a case which is difficult to debunk without asserting that the witnesses are liars. Not only must they be liars, but they must also be highly disciplined, painstaking and ingenious liars. The only other approach is to suppose that Walton and his workmates saw an unusual natural phenomenon which they misinterpreted as a flying saucer, and that Walton, knocked out by an electrical discharge from the phenomenon, wandered about in a trance for five days before fully regaining normal consciousness.

Both of these explanations have a certain plausibility, but only if you just skim through the story and pay little attention to the details. On closer examination both of them seem rather feeble. However, there seem to be no other obvious explanations and rejection of these hypotheses would leave open the possibility which dedicated sceptics will do anything to avoid.

Encounter in the forest

A very strange feature of this case is the concentration on what happened, or allegedly happened, after the incident, with very little attention being paid to the incident itself. Most writers on the subject seem to copy descriptions of the UFO encounter from one another rather than referring to the description written by Walton himself. For example, some writers tell us that when the men saw the UFO, Walton jumped out of the truck before it stopped. But, according to Walton:

Suddenly we were electrified by the most awesome, incredible sight we had seen in our entire lives.

'Stop!' John cried out. 'Stop the truck!'

As the truck skidded to a dusty halt in the rocky road, I threw open the door for a clearer view of the dazzling sight.

'My God!' Allen yelled. '*It's a flying saucer!*'

Mike shut off the engine. We watched, spellbound.

...

Turning back to that impelling spectacle in the air, I was suddenly seized with the urgency to see the craft at close range. I was afraid it would fly away and I would miss the chance of a lifetime to satisfy my curiosity about it. I hurriedly got out of the truck and started toward the hovering ship. (1)

The description that Walton gives of what happened after the 'blue-green ray' shot out from the UFO is obviously a reconstruction based on what the other witnesses said. They got the impression that Walton was hurled backwards for ten feet and fell heavily on his right shoulder. This happened very suddenly, so their recollections could be inaccurate. However, Philip Klass has made much of the fact that doctors who examined Walton about 24 hours after his return (i.e. about six days after the alleged incident) found no bruises anywhere on his body. He doesn't consider the possibility that Walton did not suffer any noticeable bruising, or that the bruises would have disappeared within a few days.

Was it a hoax?

Klass, and most other sceptics, presumably think that the whole affair was an elaborate hoax. Let us, then, consider it to have been a hoax and try to see if this explanation makes sense.

If it was a hoax then the group of loggers did not see anything unusual in the forest that day (that is, assuming that they were in the forest). Therefore the whole business must have been carefully rehearsed beforehand. Having got the concocted story clear in their minds they drove into Heber where one of the men, Ken Peterson, phoned the police. Deputy Ellison duly arrived to interview the men, who told him that Walton was missing. The men were either in a highly emotional state, or were excellent actors.

When Travis reappeared five days later he, too, was in a highly emotional state. Either that or, as generally agreed, his acting was brilliant. So, we have seven hoaxers who are fine actors, wasting their talents cutting down trees, rather than making Hollywood blockbusters.

Such a hoax requires a motive as well as the not inconsiderable ability and discipline required to fool enough people for a long enough time. Two main motives have been suggested.

Philip Klass asserted that, as the men were behind in their work, they stood to gain financially by having their contract terminated because of some cause outside their control. However, the contract was held by Mike Rogers, who paid his men by the hour for work actually done. Forest Service staff who supervised the contracts confirmed that Rogers would gain nothing by terminating his contract in this way. They didn't believe the UFO story anyway. In his latest book, Walton has explained the details of Forest Service contracts at great length (2) and Klass seems to have finally dropped this explanation, as it is not mentioned in his latest newsletter, which is entirely devoted to yet another attack on Walton, his methods and motives. (3) It is amusing to note that a number of sceptics uncritically strung along with Klass's allegations for many years, for no better reason than he has been recognised as the arch-sceptic of ufology ever since the death of Donald Menzel, who is the sceptics' equivalent of a saint.

The other motive was the large sum of money offered by the *National Enquirer* for anyone who could prove that aliens had visited the Earth. However, Walton, Rogers and the other men must have been aware that they would be thoroughly grilled about their story and that, when they were questioned separately, a fantastic yarn told by seven men would soon display serious inconsistencies and fall apart, leaving them all looking very foolish. Actually it was the UFO organisation APRO that contacted the *National Enquirer*, and not Walton or Rogers. They also must have known that they would have to face the dreaded polygraph tests.

Polygraphs

Polygraph? I was surprised, when I started looking at the literature on this case, to see how much space was devoted to the use of this absurd contraption. Believers and sceptics alike seem to treat it with great reverence. The descriptions and controversy concerning polygraph tests used in the Walton investigation have done nothing to alter my perception that 'lie detector' testing is just one of those strange and irrational American customs, like shooting holes in road signs.

The believers asserted that the polygraph tests showed that the witnesses were telling the truth and the sceptics were satisfied that they showed that they were liars. Again, the lack of consensus goes to confirm my impressions about this gadget.

Klass keeps up the pressure

The witnesses have stuck to their original story over the years and the sceptics have little more to offer by way of explanation than calling them liars. Klass goes even further, by telling us what Walton would have done if he really had been in a UFO:

If Travis was really abducted by a UFO, and even if he previously had *no* interest in the subject, UFOs should have become the focal point of his interest. He should certainly have joined APRO, whose leaders endorsed his abduction tale, to participate in its efforts to 'solve the UFO mystery'. But he did not . . . Surely he would want to attend UFO conferences and 'support group' meetings to talk to other 'abductees'. But the only UFO conferences Walton attends - always with Rogers - are those where they are invited speakers. (4)

Klass is trying to have it both ways. If Walton did these things he and other sceptics would say that he was just like the other abductees, his experiences being purely subjective. So whatever Walton does or does not do, it somehow proves that his story is false or that he is deluded. Klass also criticises Walton for refusing to attempt to recall any further details of his claimed experiences at the hands of the aliens. But if he did eventually come up a greatly extended account Klass would not believe a word of it anyway.

Jerome Clark has commented: 'Should the Walton episode turn out to be a hoax, we may be confident that it will not be the kind of hoax Klass says it was.' This seems fair enough to me, if a little enigmatic. In his latest newsletter Klass says: 'It is rumored that Clark helped Walton write his first book and there is evidence that he served as "ghostwriter" for much of the new material in Walton's recent book.' (5) Over to you, Jerry . . .

References

1. Walton, Travis. *Fire in the Sky: The Walton Experience*, Marlowe & Company, New York, 1997, 35-37
2. *Ibid.*, 303-312
3. Klass, Philip J. (ed.). *Skeptics UFO Newsletter*, No. 50, March 1998
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*

FUNDACIÓN ANOMALÍA

Vicente-Juan Ballester Olmos

In January 1997, the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture approved the official establishment of Fundación Anomalía (Anomaly Foundation), a non-profit organisation which is the first of its kind in Europe.

Fundación Anomalía is a cultural organisation, created by a group of experienced UFO researchers and supported by a large number of investigators, experts, qualified individuals, scientists and others. They have decided to offer their books, archives, experience and dedication, as well as financial assistance and know-how, to make this project viable.

This project has the following objectives:

1. To promote the study, in a rational and scientific perspective, of anomalous aerospace phenomena, commonly called UFOs, and other related subjects, as well as their social-cultural influence.
2. To preserve and professionally manage archives, files, libraries and other legacies covering such topics.
3. To continue editing the well-established UFO journal *Cuadernos de Ufología* (Ufological Papers), considered the best UFO information source in Spanish, as well as other publications, books, research monographs, essays, etc.
4. To finance UFO investigations through research grants and scholarships.

Fundación Anomalía was born within the team backing *Cuadernos de Ufología*, a loosely organised group of professionals who edit, collaborate or circulate around this most influential Spanish-language journal. As required by law, the foundation has a board of directors, composed as follows: President, Mr Julio Arcas (Santander); First Vice-president, Mr José Ruesga (Sevilla); Second Vice-president and Research Director, Mr V.J. Ballester Olmos (Valencia); Legal Director, Mr Matías Morey (Palma de Mallorca); Publications Officer, Mr Luis González (Málaga); Archives Director, Dr Antonio Petit (Sevilla); Miss Matilde González (Santander).

Fundación Anomalía unites a number of decentralised and even competing organisations, becoming an outstanding example of maturity not commonly seen in the UFO field. In order to create this foundation, several UFO libraries were donated, with over 1,200 volumes, as well as nine major national UFO archives, computer equipment, etc. The budget for the year 1998 amounts to 8 million pesetas (US \$55,000).

Projects in progress include:

- **Data base on the Spanish ufological culture.** This is a most ambitious project which aims to gather together all UFO information collected in Spain in the past 50 years: UFO reports, photographs, data on UFO organisations, press information, publications, etc.
- **Collective UFO book.** Under the editorship of University of Barcelona documentalist Mr Martí Fló, the book concept will include contributions from many authors who review local UFO data and their significance, with the purpose of being informative and didactic.
- **CD ROM on Spanish UFO literature.**
- **Field manual for UFO investigators.**

Project already accomplished:

- **Diccionario Temático de Ufología.** This is a hard-cover, 416-page thematic UFO dictionary edited by Matías Morey, with 18 contributors. The result of a three-year effort, the book was published by Fundación Anomalía in December 1997.

1998 grants:

- **'Ricardo Caruncho' Prize,** 100,000 pesetas (US \$700). This is to be awarded for the best field investigation or case analysis performed during the year.
- **'Universitas' Scholarship,** 150,000 pesetas (US \$1,000), to finance a research project on the UFO phenomenon, to be prepared in an academic environment (college, university) which applies a scientific methodology in any field. Partly sponsored by the Fund for UFO Research, Inc. (Washington, D.C.)
- **'Zurich' International Prize,** 250,000 pesetas (US \$1,700), for any quality research on the UFO problem. Entries accepted from any nation. Fully sponsored by the Zurich Insurance Co. (Barcelona, Spain)
- **'Cuadernos de Ufología' Prize,** a diploma and commemorative item to honour a UFO publication.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Timothy Good. *Alien Base: Earth's Encounters with Extraterrestrials*, Century, London, 1998. £16.99

Although few British ufologists take the ETH very seriously, most of them are uneasily aware that this is what draws the crowds to UFO lectures and, more importantly, sells books by the trainload. Seeing the danger of boring his readers with yet more rather dull official UFO reports and catalogues of funny lights in the sky, and still unable to produce evidence that would convince a reasonably alert six-year-old, Good obviously feels that he has to come up with something.

Some of us can remember the old days when we read about the amazing exploits of Adamski, Fry, Bethurum, Angelucci and all the other contactees, and naively wondered if there might possibly be some grain of truth in their stories. Quite a few of us are still around, and Good obviously realises this and is mindful of the old adage: The older they get, the dafter they get.

And what could be dafter than attempting to rehabilitate that notorious fantasist, who needs no introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, George Adamski! [Applause]

It seems that Adamski really did meet the space people, but it all went to his head and they eventually decided he was untrustworthy. How does Good know this? Simple - a friend told him. This friend had been contacted by 'the same, or a similar group of extraterrestrials that Adamski knew' who told her that 'Adamski was indeed selected and contacted by this certain group of extraterrestrials, but at an early stage he disclosed some secret information with which he had been entrusted, and it therefore became necessary for them to feed him with false information which would discredit him, thereby protecting their own interests'. So that's how it's done; if you want to know if one contactee is genuine, just ask another contactee.

There are other ways of testing the veracity of contactees. For example, Paul Villa was asked what the other crew members were doing while he was conversing with the pilot of the saucer. Villa replied that they were just bathing their feet in the river. Good remarks: 'At the time, that reply, delivered without so much as the bat of an eyelid, astonished me. Eventually, though, it contributed to a growing conviction that Paul Villa's story contains essential elements of truth.'

There are many other contactee yarns in this book, so if you are as easy to convince as Good is, then you might enjoy reading it. But do I detect a hint of doubt? The author's use of chapter headings such as 'A Pantomime of Unrealities', 'A Festival of Absurdities', 'Alien Fantasia' and 'Beyond Belief' suggests that perhaps we shouldn't take these tales too literally.

Nicholas Redfern. *The FBI Files: The FBI's UFO Top Secrets Exposed*, Simon & Schuster, London, 1998. £16.99

The FBI at one time denied that they investigated UFO reports, but files obtained from them under the provisions of the Freedom of Information legislation have shown that they have been involved from the beginning. US Army Intelligence had asked for their help in questioning witnesses to find out if they were 'sincere in their statements that they saw these discs, or whether their statements were prompted by personal desire for publicity or political reasons'.

Of particular interest are the FBI's investigations of contactees, such as Adamski and Van Tassel, which were partly accounted for by the fact that some people complained that they were spreading politically subversive ideas. Redfern, though, has devised a complicated theory to account for the FBI's continuing interest in the subject.

At an early stage, relations with the military became rather strained because the FBI suspected that they were withholding information that they had promised to share. It seems that J. Edgar Hoover was intrigued by reports of crashed saucers and was keen to discover the truth of the matter. Redfern's thesis is that, as they couldn't get satisfactory answers from the military, they attempted to obtain information by checking on people who claimed knowledge of UFO landings or crashes.

He goes into great detail about the alleged Aztec UFO crash of 1948, which is described in Frank Scully's book *Behind the Flying Saucers*. The theory is that Leo GeBauer and Silas Newton had somehow learned about it and passed on the details to Scully, who published a distorted version. He implies that the FBI's interest in these characters was due to their knowledge of UFOs rather than because of their criminal activities.

The information that Redfern has extracted from the FBI concerning their investigations of UFO reports, ufologists and witnesses is very interesting. However, as in his previous book (*A Covert Agenda*), his implausible speculations and his use of unreliable sources to bolster his support for the ETH, tends to spoil what could be a useful and serious work on his chosen theme.

LETTER

What I can reasonably add from my long-past experience of DS8 (now AS2), as well as my subsequent reading of tolerably well-compiled UFO reports, is that - setting aside the ETH altogether - I doubt that the Psychosocial Hypothesis will wholly dispose of the problem. A few (a very few) of the reports reaching the Ministry of Defence from the public suggested the existence of transient phenomena which could not be explained either by conventional occurrences of a physical kind or by imagination. Reports reaching us from RAF personnel (invariably of far higher quality and always submitted with the unease which is felt by people with a career to lose!) sometimes carried the same implication, viz. that something was going on 'out there' which had as much 'reality' - as well as the absence of 'solidity' - as any rainbow. Rainbows are utterly 'real', even if a bit idiosyncratic in their properties; the aurora borealis achieves a slightly higher degree of 'solidity' (e.g. in its detectability by radio receivers); and Nature contains other phenomena which we would be rash to dismiss as 'unreal', UFOs and ghosts perhaps being instances.

The difficulties come when people jump to simplistic conclusions about these things - e.g. rainbows are a sign from God or a manifestation of the Goddess Iris, ghosts are direct evidence for human survival of death, UFOs are visitors from space. A more 'phenomenological' approach might get us further.

Ralph Noyes, London

THE ADAMSKI SAUCER

Most ufologists agree that the dome-shaped object photographed by George Adamski was not a Venusian scout ship, as he claimed. However, he obviously photographed *something*. Many attempts have been made to identify it, most of them pure guesswork. These guesses include: an electric light fitting, a chicken feeder, the lid of a wine cooler, a part of a vacuum cleaner, and a model specially built for the purpose. No one has produced convincing evidence to support any of these identifications. Perhaps some of our readers have information or ideas that would help to clear up this little mystery?

Are you concerned about the activities of alien abduction researchers? Then you should subscribe to *Abduction Watch*, a monthly newsletter produced by Kevin McClure. In the UK only, 12 issues for £10. £5 (cash, UK cheque or International Money Order) will bring you 5 monthly issues in the UK, 4 in Europe, and 3 issues - economy airmail where available - anywhere else in the world. Please make cheques, etc. payable to Kevin McClure and send them to him at: 3 Claremont Grove, Leeds LS3 1AX, UK.

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